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Vivaldi: The 4 Seasons

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*Le
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Stagioni*



KARL MÜNCHINGER conducting

THE STUTTGART CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

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THE STUTTGART CHAMBER ORCHESTRA Conductor: KARL MÜNCHINGER
Werner Krotzinger, *Violin Solo*

The Four Seasons of Antonio Vivaldi (c. 1675-1741) describe in terms of Music a set of four sonnets dealing with Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Each Season is a self-contained Violin Concerto of three movements, using the usual fast-slow-fast plan. For his outer movements, Vivaldi used Rondo form. The slow movements are less programmatic and have great lyrical beauty.

1. LA PRIMAVERA

- A *Giunt' è la primavera e festosetti*
B *La salutano gli augei con lieto canto.*
C *E i fonti allo spirar de' zeffiretti*
Con dolce mormorio scorrono intanto.
D *Vengon coprendo l' aer di nero ammanto*
E lampi e tuoni ad annunziarla eletti
E *Indi, tacendo questi, gli augelletti*
Tornan di nuovo al lor canoro incanto.
F *E quindi sul fiorito ameno prato*
Al caro mormorio di fronde e piante
Dorme'l caprar col fido cane a late.
Di pastoral zampogna al suon festante
Danzan Ninfe e Pastor nel tetto amate
Di Primavera all' apparir brillante.

Spring: a violin concerto in E major. The first movement is a Rondo whose festive tune greets six times the coming of spring. This gives us five couplets, the first of which is a bird song, and the second the pleasant murmur of the soft spring breeze. But in the third couplet the air grows black; there is thunder and lightning. This does not go on for long, however, because the main thunderstorm is due to appear in the Summer concerto. Solo passage work leads to the fourth repeat of the main tune and to a C sharp minor couplet of plaintive beauty—more bird song. The fifth time the Spring theme is due, only the second half of it is heard, and the ensuing couplet is nothing more than a little solo work: finally the main tune, heard in the tonic, concludes the movement.

The slow movement describes a goatherd asleep with his faithful dog beside him. Harpsichord and 'cellos are silent: the violas form the bass line with a simple plucked figure. The muted violins lull us with a dotted rhythm. Above all, the solo violin sings a beautiful melody in C sharp minor.

Lastly comes a 12/8 Allegro in the tonic: a straightforward pastoral dance for nymphs and shepherds in the bright sunshine. The soloist has a good deal to do in the way of passage work.

2. L'ESTATE

- A *Sotto dura stagion dal sole accesa*
Langue l' uom, langue 'l gregge, ed arde il Pino;
B *Scioglie il cucco la voce, e tosto intesa*
C *Canta la tortorella e 'l gardellino.*
D *Zeffiro dolce spira, ma contesa*
Muove Borea improvvisa al suo vicino,
E *E piange il pastorel, perchè sospesa*
Teme fiera borasca, e 'l suo destino.
F *Toglie alle membra lasse il suo riposo*
Il timore de' lampi, e tuoni fieri
E di mosche, e mosconi il suol furioso!
G *Ab! che pur troppo i suoi timor son veri:*
Tuona e fulmina il ciel e grandinoso

Summer: a violin concerto in G minor. The first movement can hardly be called a Rondo, for Vivaldi has to fit so much into it that the Summer tune proper occurs only three times and does not form the coda. There are therefore three couplets. The main tune shows the languor of men and beasts under the hot sun, and the first couplet brings us a cuckoo. There is a great deal packed into the second couplet. After a turtle dove has sung most convincingly through the medium of the solo violin and a calm breeze has used all the upper strings, the rude North Wind, in a vigorous D minor tutti, has to blow itself out before we reach the third thematic repetition and the third episode. This is a chromatic melody on a ground bass showing the unhappiness and apprehension of the countryman who fears that his crops are going to be ruined. The return of the north wind (very free Rondo form, this) gives point to the preceding chromaticism, and we end in a menacing G minor.

The slow movements is one of Vivaldi's most daring experiments. It is in very free form, for the lyrical melody which depicts the harvester in repose is developed rather than repeated, and each couplet consists merely of a series of ominous chords suggesting thunder "off". Except that calm does not conquer storm, the whole movement might be taken as a precursor of the Andante of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, in which the soloist (there a pianoforte and here a violin) attempts to calm angry strings.

The last movement is a Presto "Tempo Impetuoso": the winds rage and the crops are ruined, the grains of the corn being scattered before they can be harvested.

3. L'AUTUNNO

- A *Celebra il villanel con balli e canti*
Del felice raccolto il bel piacere
B *E del liquor di Bacco accesi tanti*
C *Finiscono col sonno il lor godere.*
D *Fa' che ogn' uno tralasci e balli e canti*
L' aria che temperata dà piacere
E la stagion ch' invita tanti e tanti
D' un dolcissimo sonno al bel godere.
E *I cacciator alla nov' alba a caccia*
Con corni, schioppi, e cani escon fuore:
F *Fugge la helva, e suguono la traccia;*
G *Già sbigottita, e lassa al gran rumore*
De' schioppi e cani, ferita minaccia
Languida di fuggir, ma oppressa muore.

Autumn: in the same key as Beethoven's merry peasants. Those of Vivaldi celebrate even more effectively in their F major, for the very first of the three couplets of their Rondo shows them as drunk (L'Ubricato, as Vivaldi so clearly labels this section of the score), after a prolonged bout of somewhat simple rusticity. The solo violin's arpeggios give place to rapid downward scales which suggest the merry-makers' staggerings. The ensuing reprise and couplet appears to have no programmatic meaning, but the next time the tune comes round it is developed into syncopated hiccups and leads to an unfairly lovely third couplet in which the peasants are all asleep. The main rustic tune concludes the first movement on a unison and octave uncompromising F.

The slow movement describes a drunken stupor—but so beautifully that one may suppose Vivaldi forgot his subject in the inspiration of composition. The harpsichord is prominent, with continual arpeggios below muted strings. The movement starts in D minor ending on many bars of dominant (chord of A major) which finds no full close, for the last movement starts off in F for a Hunt, and a very staid main tune ushers in a long Rondo of six couplets. Although we are supposed to hear guns and dogs and other suitable sounds, this movement is not one of Vivaldi's best pieces of description.

4. L'INVERNO


- A *Agghiacciato tremar tra nevi argenti*
B *Al severo spirar do' orrido vento,*
C *Correr battendo i piedi ogni momento,*
D *E pel soverchio gel battere i denti,*
E *Passar dal foco i di quieti e contenti*
Mentre la pioggia fuor bagna ben cento,
F *Caminar sopra il ghiaccio, e a passo lento*
G *Per timor di cadel, girsene intenti,*
H *Gir forte, sdruciolar, cader a terra;*
I *Di nuovo ir sopra 'l ghiaccio e correr forte*
K *Sin ch' il ghiaccio si rompe, e si disserra,*
L *Sentir uscir dalle ferrate porte*
M *Scirocco, Borea, e tutti i Venti in guerra:*
N *Quest' è il verno, ma tal, che gioia apporta.*

Winter makes amends, being a really wonderful, and even farcical, violin concerto in F minor. Vivaldi so gives himself up to a riot of description that there is no more form in an academic sense than there is in some of the descriptive passages of Richard Strauss. Not until the sixth bar do we hear the chord of the tonic; as far as a figured bass permits we are left guessing as to the key while the strings, one by one, shiver with cold. The soloist then blows "horrid winds" at us in C minor arpeggios: a separate staff for the double basses (most unusual) and martellato for the strings above them show us stamping our feet to keep warm. Later on the solo violin's teeth chatter very rapidly in double stopping.

The slow movement in E flat is a cantabile melody for the soloist against a smoothly running accompaniment. It shows the poet going to his fireside and sitting quietly and contentedly while outside the rain wets hundreds of unfortunates. Unchristian sentiments do nothing to mar the lyrical beauty of this movement.

The last movement is as wildly descriptive as the first. Any thaw in the slow movement has clearly been arrested, for we go for a walk on the ice (solo): four bars of tutti bring a section twice as slow, for we have to go carefully in case we slip. In spite of the precaution, we do slip, first rather slowly and solemnly, then six times rapidly, and finally, octave and unison tutti, we fall through two octaves in a final cadence in F minor. After some solo passage work, the ice breaks; and then, a remarkable touch. The south wind induces thaw, and for a moment reminds us of summer: we have a hint of the main theme of the first movement of the Summer concerto. But this does not last, and a spirited "winds in conflict" ends this remarkable work.

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VIVALDI: THE FOUR SEASONS

No. 1—SPRING (La Primavera)
Allegro—Largo—Allegro

No. 2—SUMMER (L'Estate)
Allegro non molto—Adagio—Presto

KARL MÜNCHINGER

conducting the
STUTTGART CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

(Solo Violin:
WERNER KROTZINGER)

Made in England

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VIVALDI: THE FOUR SEASONS

No. 3—AUTUMN (L'Autunno)
Allegro—Adagio molto—Allegro

No. 4—WINTER (L'Inverno)
Allegro non molto—Largo—Allegro

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